

Recession-beating tips for customer retention



By [Wynand Smit](#)

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Stats SA recently announced the news of a second quarter fall of 0.7% in the Gross Domestic Product, and that this has officially plunged us into a recession, with the only minor good news being that the financial sector and the mining sector's contribution to the GDP remain buoyant. What should be of concern to companies is the burden of such a recession on consumers.

Fortunately, in the customer service environment, companies can introduce and optimise systems to benefit customers, saving them time and money when interacting with organisations.

A closer look at household expenditure

Household spending is down: households spent less on transport (down 6.1%), food and nonalcoholic beverages (down 2.8%), clothing and shoes (down 6.8%) and recreation and culture (down 7.6%) in the past quarter. The petrol price is up, and the cost of living is certainly not dropping, so every additional expense can create a blip on the radar of the household budget. Opportunities to save on costs are welcomed.



Massive fuel price increase

2 Oct 2018



An unlikely opportunity

Consumers don't simply cease to be consumers when money is tight, but they do seek ways to do business that aren't taxing their budgets. That includes how they do business with your company directly. From a company perspective, that translates to reducing pain points in the customer journey, particularly those that have an impact on your customers' pockets.

Are you asking your customer to spend hours on calls, sometimes on repeat calls, to you in order to get what they want, be that access to product or account information or to resolve another issue? Are they sitting on hold, sometimes on their mobile phones, acutely aware that their long call is costing money? Likewise, are your contact centre agents unable to resolve interactions within one call and then having to refer the customer to a different department?



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Reducing the average call duration, as well as achieving a high first call resolution rate, doesn't just drive down the cost to service customers, but it also helps customers save money and benefit from a more favourable customer experience.

Taking a closer look at processes

In financial services for example, interactions are generally more complex than in other sectors, as an interaction may involve a number of steps prior to contact resolution, from initial enquiries to sign-off on contracts. Each step has several touch points, and each touch point can become a pain point if not adequately managed.

The processes that drive interactions must be seamless; within the channel environment that means integrating channels for ease of access to the data generated by interactions.

Agents must be able to access information about both the client and the products being enquired about and must be able to update databases so that should the interaction require a second call, another agent can pick it up where the first one left off.

A great place to start is in simplifying processes: does your customer have to speak to an agent, or can the process be automated for ease of doing business? A simple process such as checking an outstanding balance on an account or a loan could easily be handled by an automated process (e.g. via USSD, SMS or an online self-service portal).

The benefit to this is that customers won't be spending additional time on calls and agents can be released to handle the

more complex interactions that require human input, such as analysis and advice.

If you go back to the data once more, effective data management and analysis is critical – accurate and accessible data can ease an interaction in terms of time and money. Contact centre agents won't spend time on wasted calls to numbers that no longer exist or try to sell irrelevant products (a car insurance package to someone who has no vehicle, for example.)

Your customer intelligence is closely linked to your business intelligence: all of the information you have must work together to produce results in an efficient manner – it's not simply about cutting back on time but also enhancing the quality of interactions.

To give an example of the practical benefits of contact centre enhancements, bearing in mind that there are many different applications across a wide variety of business requirements: a well-planned, effective implementation could take you from 5 unproductive agents making 30 calls per day in the contact centre to 70 agents operating at higher efficiency and productivity levels making 150-350 calls per day, depending on the type of call campaign, for example.

This is direct feedback from one of our clients, who also stated that following the optimisation of their debt collection process in the contact centre, they were able to increase monthly collections by more than 200%.

This is a clear indication of the return to the bottom line, but, more than that, it's producing an efficient, productive service that enhances the customer experience – you're not wasting their time, and your customers are getting what they want to get faster and easier. You're ultimately saving your consumer money, and, in a time of recession, that's a direct benefit to which they will relate.

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